

Session 1: Challenges: Pacific Library Cases

Moderator: Verenaisi Bavadra

RIDING THE WAVE: HOW MUCH A LIBRARY CAN CHANGE IN THREE YEARS

Hannah Russell

Librarian (Liaison)

National Institute of Water & Atmospheric Research (NIWA)

Wellington, New Zealand

hannah.russell@niwa.co.nz

Abstract:

In February 2011, the National Institute of Water & Atmospheric Research (NIWA) had three libraries and seven librarians spread across four sites and two islands, serving 700 plus science and support staff at fifteen sites around New Zealand's North and South Islands. Flash forward to February 2014 and NIWA has three librarians (only one of whom was around back in 2011) and one centralized library service, serving a little over 600 staff, still spread across two islands. In that time we have cut some services and decreased the size of our physical collection, but also made some technological advances, including changing our library management system to Koha, moving more and more of our journals and books online, and launching a discovery service. All of these technological changes were made with the idea of making access easier for our patrons, no matter how far they might be from the physical library collection and library staff.

Keywords:

Libraries, organizational change, integrated library systems (computer systems), classification - Universal Decimal, collection management (libraries).

NIWA

One of seven Crown Research Institutes, NIWA (the National Institute of Water & Atmospheric Research) was established in 1992, and conducts commercial and non-commercial research in the environmental sciences. The Crown Research Institutes (CRIs) are corporatized Crown entities charged with conducting scientific research for New Zealand. Foundation staff of NIWA came mainly from the former Oceanographic Institute of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, the New Zealand Meteorological Service and the Fisheries Research Division of the former Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. NIWA's work focuses on atmospheric, marine, and freshwater research - extending from the deep ocean to the upper atmosphere - in New Zealand, the Pacific, the Southern Ocean, and Antarctica.

The Libraries

At the beginning of 2011 NIWA had three main libraries, in Wellington and Hamilton in the North Island and Christchurch in the South Island, and smaller collections at five other sites around the country. We had seven staff in the team - a Library and Information Services Manager, a Records Manager, a Wellington Library Manager, and four Information Specialists based in Wellington, Hamilton, Auckland and Christchurch. We had a SirsiDynix Symphony Library Management System, which was in need of an upgrade that we had been putting off. The library team had recently been moved from within Information Technology to Communications & Marketing.

2011 Review

In February 2011, partly in response to the global financial crisis, a review of a large number of teams at NIWA was announced. Both science and support staff were reviewed and there was a focus on centralization, particularly for support teams like finance and the library.

The proposed changes for the library were fairly wide ranging. The six library staff were to be reduced by 50% and the Records Manager was to shift back to IT. Staff and parts of the collection were to be centralized in Wellington. What did remain of the collections at the other sites were to become "closed collections." Reference services like literature searching and alerting were no longer going to be provided by library staff.

There was a period of time for feedback both from library staff and library patrons, but by early April we were told that the proposed restructure was going ahead pretty much as envisaged, with all library positions to be disestablished, and two new permanent librarian positions and one contract library manager position to be established in Wellington.

Transition

The two Wellington based staff successfully applied for the newly established positions of Librarian (Services) and Librarian (Systems), which were only advertised internally. Our Information and Services Manager didn't apply for the new Library Manager contract position, which was advertised externally. Library staff made redundant finished up in June and July and our Records Manager resigned and wasn't replaced. Library liaison duties were assigned to administration staff at the other sites with library collections.

The allocated administration staff took some time adjusting to their new library duties. They were already in busy roles, and needed time to learn processes. They had little or no library experience, and in the early days things like the classification schemes were very foreign to them. All new journals and books were now sent to library staff in Wellington for processing, and the library liaisons retrieved books and journals and scanned items as we requested them.

As mentioned earlier, the restructure proposal called for services like literature searching and alerting to be dropped by library staff. These changes did go ahead as proposed. Library staff worked with patrons early on to help them set up alerts. In regard to database searching, we now provide training, advice and support with EndNote, but the actual searching is left to the patrons themselves.

More Change

Our new Library Manager started on contract in October 2011. She had a university and public library background, and brought some different ideas with her. Once she was on board we started thinking about things like merging the separate collections, rearranging our duties, the library management system, and other technologies that we might want to implement. We started weeding the collections, but the first really major change was switching our integrated library system. The systems we seriously considered were our current system Symphony, which was in need of a not inexpensive upgrade, Koha, and Liberty, which was the system that was most in use in other Crown Research Institute libraries.

Koha

After research and discussion, we selected Koha, hosted by Catalyst which is based in Wellington. We were anxious for a hosted system to be less of a burden on our IT staff, and they were keen for that too. We liked the idea of having our support in New Zealand at a time when most vendors were moving their support out of New Zealand to Australia or Asia. We really liked the look of the OPAC, which we felt was a big improvement on our current one. We were pleased that it was open source software with a very active community of users, and another big plus was that after the migration it would cost less than our current system. We went live with Koha in December 2012. We also used the move to Koha as an opportune time to move to barcoding.

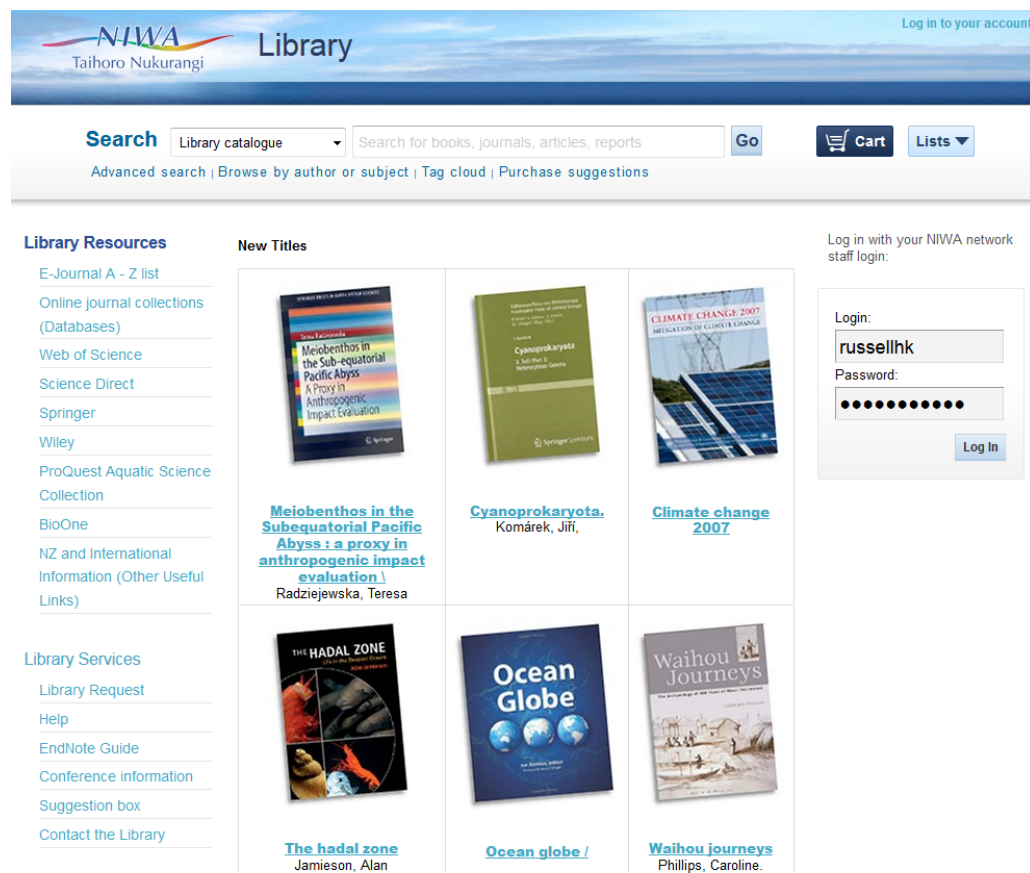


Figure 1. NIWA Library Homepage.

Although for the most part we are really happy with Koha, there are a couple of issues. We think the relevancy ranking leaves a bit to be desired, but the community is aware of and working on this. The Serials Management function is a bit clunky, but our next upgrade should provide some improvements. And although we are not using it, some people are not pleased with the Acquisitions Module. However, every system has its strengths and its weaknesses, and for our purposes Koha has a lot of strengths.

Another difference with Koha is the way that we are charged. Previously we had been paying one lump sum once a year with everything covered. Now any changes that we might need are considered “development” and are charged accordingly.

Other Changes

After our move to Koha, we started to think about the classification of our books. One of the stumbling blocks for merging our collections was the different classification schemes in place. The Wellington and Christchurch collections were mostly in UDC, with small patches of older items in Dewey, but the Hamilton collection was in Library of Congress. We first decided to go with Dewey since as all our new records - which we could now import through a Z39.50 connection into Koha - came with Dewey classification. A few months later we realized just what a huge job it would be to change everything we already had in UDC and LC over to Dewey, and we decided to revert back to UDC.

Our library manager spent a lot of time her first year with us concentrating on our journal subscriptions. We already had large e-journal packages through Elsevier, Springer and Wiley, and she decided to move as many other titles as possible from hard copy to electronic in order to free up space in the physical collection. She also consolidated as many of our subscriptions as possible with Ebsco. She reviewed a lot of the titles we received on exchange from other institutions and decided a number were no longer needed, or could be displayed briefly and then discarded. She also had a hard look at the usage statistics for our electronic journals, and cancelled some titles.

Another change was the reassignment of some duties between us. Document supply, which had previously been done solely by the Librarian (Services), was now done by everyone on a rostered basis, as were book acquisitions, which were previously done by the library manager. Once the library manager had made the major changes for our journal subscriptions, the Librarian (Services) picked up responsibility for the management of our Ebsco subscriptions, and the Librarian (Systems) took over responsibility for our remaining direct subscriptions. The Librarian (Services) also took over responsibility for user education, and consequently later had a title change from Librarian (Services) to Librarian (Liaison).

In March 2013, our Librarian (Systems) announced her retirement. She was replaced in May 2013 in the re-named position of Librarian (Technologies). Then later in 2013 our library manager announced her resignation, as she and her family were leaving New Zealand. Our new library manager started in early November 2013, and the position was made permanent rather than contract.

During this time of personnel changes we also had to deal with collection merging, as the Hamilton and Christchurch sites were making plans for re-purposing their library spaces. The original restructure

proposal had intended for “closed collections” to remain in Hamilton and Christchurch, but in reality that proved difficult to implement. In order to make room in Wellington, a lot of weeding was necessary, and this is still ongoing. With journals we concentrated on removing print where we were confident of electronic access and eliminating duplication between the collections. We weeded a lot of duplicate books and items that we considered out of date or off topic for the work that NIWA currently undertakes. We had help from science staff in identifying these. We also weeded a fair number of little or never used foreign language items.

In September 2013 the first of our Christchurch journals arrived in Wellington. These needed some weeding, and were then merged into the collection with student help. Hamilton journals and books were packed up in late 2013, and were unpacked in Wellington early this year, again with student help. The journals were merged straight into the collection but the books couldn’t be as they were still classified in LC. They are sitting as a separate run at present and we hope to be able to employ a contractor sometime in the near future to get them reclassified in UDC. More Christchurch journals and some of the Christchurch books were packed up in August 2014, and were merged into the Wellington collection in September and October 2014, once more with student help. More weeding and packing was done in Christchurch in October 2014. More weeding still needs to be done in Wellington as we have a whole run of journals in what we refer to as our “Stack” that haven’t yet been assessed. And sometime in the future we will start looking at the collections at some of our smaller sites.

Ebsco Discovery Service

2014 also saw us go live with a discovery system, the Ebsco Discovery Service (EDS). We looked at a few other discovery products, but since most of our journal subscriptions were already with Ebsco and we had their A-Z e-journals product as well, and because the price compared favourably to others, it seemed sensible to go with EDS. We worked closely with a developer at Ebsco and used an Application Programming Interface (API) in our existing Koha system to minimize changes to the library patron experience. We started with a soft launch where patrons had to choose to search using the EDS, but switched it over to be the default search option fairly quickly after there were no complaints. It has proven fairly seamless, with most people not even noticing a difference even though their searches will now often return a larger set of results. The OPAC home page with the discovery layer over top looks almost identical to our Koha version. The only real difference is the slightly expanded and adjusted list of fields available for searching. Also pleasing is the EDS’s relevancy ranking. The EDS advanced search was launched in a fairly recent update to the plugin software, and there are a few differences between it and our Koha advanced search so there are still a few bugs. For example, the cart functionality isn’t working for Discovery records. But all in all we are really pleased with it.

Conclusion

So there it is – a lot of changes in three short years. A restructure leading to staff cutbacks, two new library managers and one new librarian, changes in provided services, reduced space leading to a lot of weeding, the merging of remaining collections, a change in integrated library systems and a move to barcoding, changes in areas of responsibilities, and the launch of a discovery service. At times it has definitely felt as though we were on a ship at sea, riding a wave and holding on for dear life!

References

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